



Microwave Magic or Mayhem?

How many of us have turned a pleasing piece of work only to have it move or worse still, crack and split later. Workshops tend to be cold environments and the change to an indoor one, particularly if centrally heated can be very detrimental to a wooden item.

Wood is an organic material and will absorb and release moisture according to the humidity of its surroundings although the type of finish on the work will have some effect.

If the wood is green or only partially dry, movement will be even more pronounced. On some occasions such as very thin green turning, the movement can be a feature but on the whole it is undesirable.

If like me, you turn mainly native woods which you have acquired locally, you need to give this movement some consideration. Many turners rough turn a piece to an even thickness then put it back for several months for further seasoning. There are obvious disadvantages to this method. For me, the main one is having to decide what the item is going to be so far in advance. I like to have an idea and get on with it from start to finish. To get round this I decided to have a go at microwaving some wood, having read several different articles on the subject.

I must emphasise that microwaving wood is not infallible and can be dangerous. Your work may still split or warp or worse still, explode or catch fire so great care must be taken. Little and often is a good maxim and do not leave the wood unattended. If you see smoke, stop the process immediately and allow things to cool down. You could damage the microwave so try to use one in the workshop.

There are various techniques described in the articles I researched but they all begin by weighing the work once it has been rough turned. The aim is to achieve a constant weight.

If you see hairline cracks appearing, it is possible to prevent further splitting by applying superglue.

Most methods involved microwaving on the defrost setting from 1 to 6 minutes, depending on size of work. Some wrapped the work in clingfilm, some used kitchen roll. In between microwave bursts, the wood is allowed to cool down and then reweighed. Any moisture in the microwave or wrapping, is removed between each session.



My wet blank



Weighing the turned platter



Initially, moisture obscures the bag. By the end, little moisture evaporates and the bag remains clear.

The technique which I tried a few years ago was a little more drastic so I have repeated it for the purpose of this article although I have reduced the time of microwaving as it was a small piece. I turned a small platter from a piece of holly which was cut a few months ago but had been left outside so was wet from rain as well as being unseasoned. As a consequence it had some staining.

The platter weighed 91gms when removed from the lathe. I then placed it in a plastic bag and microwaved it on full power for 30 seconds. The bag blew up and moisture could be seen condensing inside. If you try this, stop if the bag looks as though it may burst.

I removed it from the bag and placed it on kitchen towel with another piece over it to absorb the surface moisture. Take care at this stage as it is hot. After cooling, I repeated the procedure using a dry plastic bag each time and I weighed the work regularly. Initially weight loss was about 6 or 7gms each time. At 63/62gms loss became minimal so I stopped the process there.



Final weighing. Note the piece has become oval.



Mounted in wood jaws for trueing up



Warping quite noticeable



A green birch platter microwaved several years ago in order to add some pyrography. It has remained perfectly stable,

You will see from the photographs that the work warped considerably so I allowed it to relax before remounting it in my wood jaws. I then trued up the chucking spigot and underside before rechucking and finishing normally.

Do remember, microwaves vary and timber varies both in characteristics, size and moisture content so, proceeding with caution, experiment to see what works for you. Keep notes for reference to repeat successes and avoid failures.

January Competition Results



Mike Moon

There was a good selection of entries. The winner was 8A by Richard Hasleden. Winner of the Novice class was Mike Moon no 2N. Other entries were 1N, Jayne Brown, 3N, Gareth Garner, 4I, Paul Filsell, 5I, Mike Pollard, 6A, Lynn Chambers and 7A, Pete Hawes. Brian Rowson was the judge. Thank you Brian.



Richard Hasleden

For future entries it would be helpful to the judges if members could give sizes for their work along with any other details they wish to include.

Online Demonstrations

Record Power are holding Zoom demos with turners from around the world. Free to join, there are 2 sessions per demo, usually lasting 1½-2 hours, giving you the choice of a convenient time slot according to differing time zones. I have watched two of these and they have been very worthwhile. To join, email miked@recordpower.co.uk with RSVP in the subject line. If you do not have a zoom account Mike will send details of how to join.

Chestnut products are still running regular Conkers live demos on You tube and Axminster has a long list of online demonstrations, also on You tube.

Dates for 2021 Meetings

Although at this stage we have no idea when our meetings can resume, the calendar has been drawn up as follows with two provisional demonstrations.

21 March

18 April

16 May

13 June

18 July Comp and Social

15 August: Gary Rance

19 September: Stuart Furini

17 October

21 November

12 December Competition and Social

Competition Entries



2N Onion pot and stopper in oak 3" high

3N Portuguese chopping bowl approx 9" diameter turned for a chef.



4N Knitters in the style of German smokers



1N Remembrance. Ash platter 11½" WW1 soldier silhouette in centre soldiers and poppies on rim.



5A A pair of goblets in oak, matching but not identical. 6½" tall. A commission.



6A Garden birds' eggs 2x lifesize, turned and painted for a budding naturalist.



7A Hazel burr urn 7"x7"

Peter Smith.

Members will be sad to learn that Peter Smith, a longstanding member of the club, has died. Peter along with his wife, Daphne, attended meetings regularly and ran the raffle until Daphne had a stroke and he devoted his life to caring for her until her death in 2019. Peter was a skilled turner and did much to support the club retaining his membership until the end. We send our condolences to his family.

Chairman	Maggie Wright
Vice Chairman and	
Competition Secretary	Peter Castle
Secretary	Anne Smith
Treasurer	John Turner
Events organiser	Greg Collett
Librarian	David Spice
Newsletter editor	Sandra Day
A-V co-ordinator	Brian Rowson

www.wealdenwoodturners.org.uk

March Newsletter

The next newsletter is due to be published on
March 14th
Contributions, photographs and competition
entries to reach me by Tuesday March 9th